

THE TRUTH

"COMFORT WOMEN"



That the Japanese government has never fully accepted responsibility for their suffering or paid compensation is bad enough; that Mr. Abe would retreat from previous statements is a disgrace for a leader of a major democracy.

— WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL,
March 28, 2007

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations dispatched members to the related countries to look into damage reports, and it publicized the results. Based on its findings, the federation has four times urged the prime minister to make a formal apology and extend compensation to individuals.

— OP-ED by KOKI TSUCHIYA, FORMER PRESIDENT
of the JAPAN FEDERATION OF BAR ASSOCIATIONS, in
ASIAN SHIBBUK, April 16, 2007



It's understandable, then, that Mr. Abe's statement earlier this month that there was no evidence that the wartime military had coerced the women into sexual service was met with outrage throughout the region. Japan was once again playing fast and loose with the truth. The outrage even reached Washington, where Michael Honda, a California Democrat of Japanese descent, introduced a nonbinding resolution in the House of Representatives calling on Japan to make an unambiguous apology.

— WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITORIAL,
March 28, 2007

Historical records show that the Japanese government organized the enslavement and rape of 200,000 girls and women during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from 1932 through the end of World War II. The victims were referred to as "comfort women," but they were mostly girls under eighteen, some as young as twelve.

They were kept in military "comfort stations" and were subject to inhuman and degrading forms of sexual violence. They endured repeated rape — up to 50 times a day — mutilation, and disease. Many did not survive the brutality and horror of their captivity. Others were executed after the war or never made it home. Those who did survive lived in shame and obscurity for decades, until reports of organized rape camps during the war in Bosnia prompted survivors to begin coming forward in the early 1990s.

In response to sworn testimonies of the survivors, as well as irrefutable historical documentation, Japanese officials have issued ambiguous statements that fail to acknowledge the precise nature of these crimes in order to sidestep legal obligations resulting from violations of international law. In short, Japan has never taken full responsibility for this crime, and it has never made a clear apology. Recently Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe alarmed the international community by retreating from previous statements of contrition and launching a campaign to deny that the government was directly involved.

There is a large amount of well-documented evidence and careful research detailing the official sanctioning of the "Comfort Women" system by the Japanese government. The Japanese government's hollow apologies and continued denial of responsibility add to the suffering of survivors. A full apology would include Japan accepting full responsibility for the crimes by acknowledging that the actions against the "Comfort Women" amount to crimes under international law, acknowledging the harm suffered by survivors, denouncing all forms of sexual violence against women, and expressing sincere remorse to survivors.

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LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH, April 18, 2007

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